

In The Claims:

Please amend claim 1 so that the claims hereafter read as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A composition comprising:

a thixotropic gel; and

an antimicrobial agent contained in the thixotropic gel, the antimicrobial agent being present in the thixotropic gel in sufficient concentration as to render the composition antimicrobial;

wherein the composition ~~thixotropic gel~~ ~~is characterized by:~~  
~~(i)~~ flows freely ~~flow~~ upon the application of a threshold level force imparted by a conventional medical syringe so ~~such~~ that the composition is (i) instillable ~~may be instilled~~ into a hemodialysis catheter using ~~such~~ a conventional medical syringe in order ~~so as~~ to completely fill the hemodialysis catheter, and (ii) easily withdrawable ~~withdrawn~~ from the hemodialysis catheter using ~~such~~ a conventional medical syringe;

~~(ii)~~ wherein the composition is sufficiently cohesiveness,  
~~such~~ that, when the composition moves ~~is moved~~ through the lumen

of a hemodialysis catheter ~~using a conventional medical syringe,~~  
the composition advances through the lumen as a cohesive  
rod-shaped mass; and

~~(iii)~~ wherein, when a hemodialysis catheter is installed in  
the vascular system of a patient and the composition fills is-  
~~disposed within the lumen of the a hemodialysis catheter which is~~  
~~installed in the vascular system of a patient,~~ the composition  
remains in the lumen of the hemodialysis catheter; and

further wherein the composition ~~thixotropic gel~~ is  
biocompatible and biodegradable in blood.

2. (Canceled)

3. (Previously Presented) A composition according to claim  
1 wherein the gel is a hydrogel.

4. (Previously Presented) A composition according to claim  
1 wherein the gel is a microgel.

5. (Previously Presented) A composition according to claim  
1 wherein the antimicrobial agent is taurolidine, taurultam or a  
mixture thereof.

6. (Previously Presented) A composition according to claim 1 wherein the gel also contains a medically acceptable anticoagulant agent.

7. (Previously Presented) A composition according to claim 1 wherein the composition contains salicylic acid or one of its salts.

8. (Canceled)

9. (Withdrawn) A locking agent for an indwelling catheter that is composed of a thixotropic gel or a colloidal fluid that is retained in the catheter with minimal loss during instillation and/or the duration between uses of the catheter and can be instilled and withdrawn using a syringe.

10. (Withdrawn) A catheter lock solution according to claim 9 in which the agent is albumin.

11. (Previously Presented) A composition according to claim 3 wherein the hydrogel is a natural polymer.

12. (Previously Presented) A composition according to claim 11 wherein the natural polymer comprises at least one selected from the group consisting of: serum albumin; collagen; and alginates.

13. (Previously Presented) A composition according to claim 3 wherein the hydrogel is a synthetic polymer.

14. (Previously Presented) A composition according to claim 13 wherein the synthetic polymer comprises at least one selected from the group consisting of: polyvinyl alcohol; poly(ethylene oxide); poly(hydroxyethylene); and a polyelectrolyte.

15. (Previously Presented) A composition according to claim 14 wherein the polyelectrolyte comprises at least one from the group consisting of: poly(acrylic acid); poly(styrene sulfonate); and carboxymethylcellulose (CMC).

16. (Withdrawn) A system comprising:  
a hemodialysis catheter; and

a catheter lock comprising a thixotropic gel containing an antimicrobial agent therein.

17. (Withdrawn) A method for providing microbe-free access to the vascular system of a patient, the method comprising the steps of:

providing a hemodialysis catheter;

deploying the hemodialysis catheter into the vascular system of a patient; and

sealing the hemodialysis catheter with a catheter lock, wherein the catheter lock comprises a thixotropic gel containing an antimicrobial agent therein.

18. (Withdrawn) A method for preventing microbial colonization of a lumen of a catheter placed within a patient, the method comprising the steps of:

providing a catheter lock, wherein the catheter lock comprises a thixotropic gel containing an antimicrobial agent therein; and

sealing the catheter with the catheter lock.

19. (Previously Presented) A composition according to claim 1 wherein the gel is a colloidal dispersion.

20. (Withdrawn) A system according to claim 16 wherein the catheter is a hemodialysis catheter.